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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor's Keyboard
"~~~~~"

"Saying it like it is!"

I realize that I'm always complaining how fast time goes by, but this is ridiculous! How did we get from November to April so quickly? Did I fall asleep and we went from fall to spring? Wait a minute! The calendar say December! At least here in New England, you'd never know it by the weather! The trees have buds, flowers are coming up, and the geese are flying north!! This has been great. Record high temperatures almost every day this week. You just know we're going to pay for this weather eventually!

I've been thinking about the proposed Microsoft settlement news lately, and something about it just didn't feel right to me. Forget the fact that Microsoft seems to be on the verge of getting away with just a slap on the wrist. There was something else that I couldn't put my hands on, but I knew that it was there, somewhere. Then I saw a few commentaries from a few people online, and then another story this week from Apple.

This case came about due to Microsoft being accused of antitrust violations and how it was becoming monopolistic. The Justice Department and a number of states successfully proved that this was indeed occurring. Found guilty and then got "off" on appeal. A new judge demanded a settlement. What settlement is proposed/offered? Computers and Microsoft software for thousands of needy schools! In and of itself, the offer is a noble one. There are schools in need of computer equipment and software that might otherwise not be able to afford buying it.

Now, being the ever-cynical person who thinks that "if something seems too good to be true, it usually isn't" - I can picture this as yet another way for Microsoft to continue to monopolize the industry by getting more of its software embedded into another market - schools. What about Apple? The school system is probably the last vestige that Microsoft doesn't have its hooks into fully - it's Apple's niche market.

Now I believe in competition as much as the next guy. Let the better company or product win on an even playing field. But this is not a competitive move, it's a brilliant scheme on Microsoft's part! This is not a settlement. It's not a charitable act. It's more of the same old Microsoft finding a way to get deeper into the customer base and squashing its competitors. What do you think?

Me, I'm going to find the suntan lotion and sit on the deck and catch a few rays with a nice cold beer!

Until next time...

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Remember a few weeks ago when I said something to the effect of "well, winter is on its way"?

It seems that the reports of autumn's demise have been exaggerated. The weather here in southern New England have been nothing short of remarkable. The temperatures this week have been more indicative of April than December.

Now I'm not going to start yelling about global warming or El Nino, since I fully realize that this could well be nothing more than a statistical aberration.

I remember way back in the dim mists of time when I was a kid. It seems that we could always count on at least a couple of light snowfalls between Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Of course, I can remember my grandmother telling me that, when she was a kid, they always had snow for Thanksgiving. How much is fact and how much is our faulty memories is hard to tell, and I'm not at all sure that what I remember is the way it actually was.

On another subject, I notice that there are several more trojans, worms, and viruses out there preying on Windows machines. Windows is kind of like having sex these days: If you're planning on having Windows, you really should make sure you have protection. <grin>

Seriously though, if you "do email" on a Windows machine, get yourself some anti-virus software and update it at least weekly.

To tell the truth, I'd love to be able to say that all of the virus problems out there are the fault of Windows and Microsoft, but it just ain't so.

Sure, Microsoft made some mistakes and left some security holes in Windows, but it's these freaks who have nothing better to do than to write these snippits of code. The fact that Windows is the target is mostly because of its popularity. I wish I could say that it's Microsoft's fault, but it isn't.

Well, let's get to the news and stuff from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
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Joe Zorin asks about installing a hard drive on his ST:

"I just bought from someone online a Mega ST4 and an Atari hard drive, SH205. I'm having trouble with getting the hard drive running.

First of all, I used several Atari computers from when they first came out until when I bought my first IBM compatible PC in 94. Since then I've only used my old Atari to run certain programs I created for my work and haven't yet ported to the PC.

My Atari's floppy stopped working which is why I bought a system online. For my old Atari I had a hard drive custom built before the Atari hard drives came out.

Anyway, the fellow who sold me the Atari said that he wiped the hard drive clean but reinstalled the Atari hard drive software so it should boot up, but it doesn't.

I'm not even sure I have the hard drive plugged in properly. It has 2 ports on the back, one is "out" and one is "in". I presume the "out" is the one to use. I vaguely remember that it is necessary to first turn on the hard drive, let it come up, then turn on the computer. What happens is that the computer's drive "A" light stays on and the hard drive doesn't come up. If I put a floppy in the drive, the light will go off but the computer can't see the floppy complaining that the disc or floppy drive is no good and I do not see an icon for the hard drive. If I turn the computer on without the hard drive turned on, then the computer successfully sees drive A.

The fellow who sold me the computer then emailed me what he says is the Atari hard drive software. It consists of 2 folders. The first is called Ahdi and in it are 2 files, Ahdi.prg and Shdriv.sys. The other folder is Hdx and in it are Hdx.prg and Hdx.rsc.

So, how do I install this hard drive software? What steps are necessary as far as turning on the computer and hard drive and what should be in the floppy? Do I need to remove those files from the folders?

I used to be really good at Atari tech stuff and did a lot of programming with Laser C. But, it's been almost 10 years since I did any such tech stuff- and I don't have the hard drive installation instructions.

I wouldn't be surprised the hard drive has the software already installed but I must be doing something wrong."

'Pelcombe-Ilford' tells Joe:

"I suspect it might be a SCSI drive, in which case you might need to connect the computer to the 'IN' port, and then connect a SCSI terminator block to the 'OUT' port.

(This might just be a shot in the dark, since I'm not familiar with the Atari built hard drives, I'm working from my experience with a System Solutions external SCSI drive, which I operated with a ST+ SCSI adaptor and a Falcon. I hope this information is useful though.)"

Peter West adds:

"I think the old Atari hard disks had DMA connections with an internal host adapter. Most were of the old RLL or MSF type - definitely not SCSI.

But, Joseph, you should connect his DMA lead to the IN socket! The OUT was mainly for the Atari Laser, but could be used with a Link or similar device to connect to SCSI drives. Also, try downloading their demo version of HDDRIVER from Uwe's site. If it works, buy the full version -it's the best Atari hard disk driver there is!

You can run HDDRIVER from the floppy - as you can AHDI - and install it on the hard drive. Don't forget you have to add the partition icons manually to the desktop, unless you have Thing or jinnee which will install them all with one mouse click. With the Atari desktop, click on one of the floppy icons, then 'Install Disk Drive' and type in 'C' (capital!) for the drive and 'Hard Disk' for the name. If the disk has several partitions, repeat this for each one, incrementing the letter by one each time (it doesn't matter if you install too many - if the partitions don't exist you will get a warning message when you try and open them, so delete the surplus ones by dragging their icon(s) to the wastebasket. Once you have icons for all partitions installed and dragged to your preferred positions, don't forget to 'Save Desktop'."

Ken Kosut asks about CAB and PPP-Connect:

"I am having some problems connecting with PPP-Connect.

Falcon/Magic 6.01/HS-modem

I have DRVIN.PRG and SCC.PRG in the AUTO folder.
(also SOCKETS.PRG)

Is DRVIN necessary with Magic? Do I have to adjust DRVIN and SCC with Setter?

I used ICONF.PRG to create a New set.
I got it to dial in one time, but it would not connect.

Local Code Reject NO
Remote Code Reject NO
Local Protocol Reject NO
Remote Protocol Reject NO
Remote Authentication Request NO
Remote Line Quality Report Request NO
Peer did not provide Local IP-address NO
DNS IP address NO
Timeout YES

I was told to leave the local IP address set to 0. I put in a DNS IP, but now the modem won't dial in. I would appreciate any suggestions."

Gerhard Stoll tells Ken:

"You can try to set the RBL2 and TBL2 to 8196 bytes or higher."

Derryck Croker adds:

"Yes, use DRVIN. Driver, scc and sockets in that order.

I think it should work as-is. English docs for HSModem are on my web site by the way.

Make sure you set the port to Modem2, usual 8-N-1 for the other settings, I've got a simple atz for the modem command.

Local IP address should be 0.0.0.0

Login - try just the "Done" entry, with PPP ticked

DNS - either enter the one that the ISP provides, or enter 0.0.0.0. It will then be negotiated during connection. Failure to enter or negotiate a DNS won't make a ha'porth's worth of difference to dialling in, just that you won't be able to browse any web sites unless you know their IP address."

You might find it's a problem with the running order in your Auto folder, see above. If IConnect stalls during the "negotiation" stage, then it's worth activating the terminal and responding to your ISP's questions - you can use the results as a script. Usually the "Done" entry is all you need, but the ISP I use now wants a little chat with a script."

Ken makes some adjustments and tells us:

"I rearranged programs in Auto Folder (DRVIN, SCC and SOCKETS) Went to Terminal Mode and Logged on Manually. After my ISP made an adjustment, I was able to log on."

Klaus Seiner asks for info about replacing drives in his Stacys:

"I've got 2 Stacys (2 and 4).

How can I replace the floppy (has read errors all the time) and the HD (is dead) and what to replace them with? (E.g. Which floppy drive/hard disk - where can i get them etc.)"

Joshua Kaijankoski tells Klaus:

"Why don't you sell me one of the Stacys and I'll take care of it <smile>

Any older SCSI drive should be ok on it. Keep in mind that TOS 1.04 can't support partitions that are too big. I forget the limit. I am under the impression that any ST 720K drive will work on the Stacy."

Lyndon Amsdon adds:

"[They] Should accept either as long. I have a Sanyo laptop drive that could be made to work on the Stacy as it has a cut down shugart interface.

Basically it doesn't have as many GND pins. Problem would be making it fit neatly, these aren't standard. Or did the Stacy have a standard height drive, surely not!

I was actually talking about the floppy drive, but...

They take 3.5" scsi hds? no wonder they wasted batteries in minutes!!"

Well folks, that's it for this week. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - Xbox Online Players Jump Gun!  
    " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " " "  
                                GameCube Sales Reach 600,000!  
                                Dutch Block PlayStation Ones!  
                                And more!
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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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Nintendo GameCube Sales Now Close to 600,000 Units

Nintendo Co Ltd said on Monday sales of its new GameCube video game console had reached nearly 600,000 units in the 15 days since the console was launched in the United States on November 18.

Nintendo said in a statement the sales figure pointed to an average of 27 GameCube consoles being bought every minute since the console made its debut, three days after the launch of Microsoft Corp's Xbox gaming console.

Microsoft has not released sales figures of its rival Xbox console.

The Japanese game maker shipped a total of 740,000 of the \$199 GameCube consoles to North America for last month's launch, with about 80 percent of that total going to U.S. retailers.

Nintendo has said it expects to sell 1.3 million GameCube consoles by year-end, while Microsoft has said it expects to ship between one million and 1.5 million units of its \$299 Xbox console by year-end.

Dutch Government Blocks Sale of Sony Playstation Ones

The Dutch government said on Tuesday it had blocked the sale of more than 1.3 million Sony Corp. Playstation One consoles and accessories in November because the cables contained too much cadmium.

Sony's new Playstation Two consoles were not involved.

The government said in a statement that Dutch customs and the state's health inspection service IHM had discovered the consoles and 800,000 accessories -- estimated to be worth 400 million guilders (\$162 million) -- during an inspection of a distribution center in Tilburg, a town in the south-central Netherlands.

The case would be studied by the Dutch public prosecution office, it said.

'The cables attached to devices belonging to the (consoles) contained much too high values of cadmium... The cables, which were examined, contained values of cadmium varying between three and more than 20 times the allowed value," the government said.

A spokesman for the Dutch Ministry for Environment said that large concentrations of cadmium were banned in the Netherlands -- in line with European Union policy -- to prevent it from entering the food chain.

'Cadmium damages the kidneys," spokesman Joost Kehrner told Reuters.

Within the European Union no goods are allowed to be imported which contain more than 0.01 percent cadmium, he said.

In reaction, Sony confirmed that the Playstation consoles had been impounded by the Dutch government.

'But the health risk is for incorrect disposal (of the cable) only," David Reeves, Sony Computer Entertainment senior vice president of sales and marketing Europe, said. 'We have reservations about the interpretation of the law by the Dutch authorities," he added.

Reeves said that Sony was already replacing the peripherals and had started to ship the Playstation One consoles again.

Sony Swaps PlayStation One Cables After Dutch Move

Sony Computer Entertainment Inc said on Wednesday it was replacing peripheral cables for 1.3 million PlayStation One game consoles after the Dutch government blocked sales of the machines on health and environmental concerns.

The Dutch government said on Tuesday it had blocked shipment of the consoles and 800,000 accessories bound for the European Union market in a warehouse in the Netherlands in November because the cables contained too much cadmium.

Sony Computer, the unit of Sony Corp that makes and sells PlayStation, said on Wednesday it had already started replacing the cables. It hoped to resume limited shipments of the consoles by mid-December, with full supplies as soon as possible.

'Although we have reservations about the interpretation of the regulations (by the Dutch authorities), we have begun replacing the cables," a Sony Computer spokeswoman said.

Sony Computer said that its new PlayStation 2 consoles were not affected by

the ruling because they do not use the same peripheral cables.

The company would not replace cables for PlayStation One consoles sold in countries outside Europe if they did not violate environmental regulations in those nations, it said.

Sony Computer also said it would not recall any consoles already sold in Europe as the amount of cadmium in the cables did not in its view pose a health risk to users.

The cadmium contained in the cables only posed a risk if incorrectly disposed of, in which case it could have long-term environmental effects, Sony said.

Within the European Union no goods are allowed to be imported that contain more than 0.01 percent cadmium. The Netherlands said the cables contained between three and 20 times the allowed amount.

A spokesman for the Dutch environment ministry said on Tuesday that large concentrations of cadmium were banned in the Netherlands -- in line with European Union policy -- to prevent it from entering the food chain.

'Cadmium damages the kidneys," spokesman Joost Kehrner said.

Sony Computer did not say how much the cable replacement would cost the company.

The consoles were sold at an average list price of about \$89 in Europe, with the price varying from country to country, it said.

The Dutch government on Tuesday estimated the 1.3 million consoles and 800,000 accessories to be worth \$162 million.

Xbox Online Players Jump the Gun on Microsoft

Microsoft officials are so far not upset -- and apparently not inclined to take pre-emptive action -- in response to non-sanctioned moves to take Xbox games online before the company is ready to do so.

The software giant, which unveiled its Xbox console last month and is planning to release online offerings for the games by summer 2002, calls recent efforts by GameSpy Arcade and Xbox Gateway "an interesting science experiment by and for hard-core gamers."

Microsoft also is calling on consumers and retailers to wait patiently for its own online offerings, which it says will provide a superior gaming experience with fewer glitches.

For those who cannot wait, the newest player on the scene is Xbox Gateway, a Linux-based application that lets users play some Xbox games over the Internet.

Developers of the Xbox Gateway make clear on their Web site that their program has no official connection to or approval from Microsoft. The site says the program is "just a temporary work-around until Microsoft releases their own network service."

The gateway's developers, identified on their site only as "Rooty and Tzar," could not be reached by TechExtreme for comment. According to the site, the application works similarly to an Ethernet bridge, by splitting game data into packets and distributing them to players online.

The program is for Xbox games that support multiplayer functions on local area networks (LANs), usually denoted by the "System Link Play" option under the games' multiplayer menu. The application requires a broadband Internet connection, a PC and an Xbox console.

Users must have a Linux server or a PC with the developers' boot disk installed on the same network as the Xbox.

So far, the gateway program has been tested only on the games Halo and Tony Hawk 2X in system-link mode. Developers report that they were able to connect two Xbox consoles on a cable modem with no time lag, but lag did occur when a third box was added.

However, developers said they were able to connect four Xboxes via a DSL connection with very little lag.

In recent weeks, the Web site GameSpy Arcade has been offering similar software downloads, not based on Linux, to play preview or review versions of Halo, Tony Hawk 2x and NASCAR Heat 2002 online.

Responding to these offerings, Jon Lenaway, a spokesperson for a Los Angeles PR firm handling Microsoft's Xbox efforts, referred TechExtreme to a section of the company's Web site geared to retailers.

"It's amazing and exciting to see the lengths that gamers will go to in order to take their Xbox games online," Microsoft tells retailers. "The GameSpy Arcade efforts are a strong indication that people want online console game experiences."

Microsoft said these efforts "showcase the superiority of Xbox," which has been designed to provide fast and secure play for an unlimited number of gamers, eventually.

The company said its offerings will include voice capabilities, downloadable content, tournaments and other features not currently viable under the non-commissioned programs.

Microsoft said the independent offerings don't scale well beyond two players in the online environment. The company added that its official programs for Xbox online play will not require the presence of a PC.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

AT&T Web Network Switches Excite Customers

AT&T Corp. on Monday said it has moved to its own network nearly 40 percent of its 850,000 customers who lost service this weekend when bankrupt Web-access provider ExciteAtHome Corp. shut off service.

But, AT&T said Internet subscriber growth at its AT&T Broadband unit for the fourth-quarter would be hurt by the uncertainty and disruptions surrounding the Excite situation.

About 330,000 subscribers in Oregon, Washington, and the Dallas area have been moved to the new AT&T Broadband network, the company said in a statement. Customers in San Francisco and Illinois are scheduled to be moved during the day on Monday, and by day's end it expects to have switched 657,000 subscribers to its network.

The balance of its affected customers will be switched by Friday, it said.

About 850,000 AT&T Broadband Internet customers lost their service on Saturday after a U.S. Bankruptcy Court judge on Friday ruled that Excite could unplug cable-modem customers in order to negotiate a better resolution to its Chapter 11 bankruptcy proceedings. AT&T owns 23 percent of Excite and would like to buy the remaining stake.

Excite@Home Wins Temporary Reprieve

A handful of major cable companies came to the temporary rescue of beleaguered cable Internet provider Excite@Home with deals to extend the company's life by infusing hundreds of millions of dollars over the next several months.

Subject to approval by Bankruptcy Court Judge Thomas E. Carlson, both Comcast Cable Communications, Inc. and Cox Communications said Tuesday that their separate three-month, US\$160 million deals would ensure their customers' uninterrupted Internet service until their own networks could be built.

The deals will protect Comcast's 792,000 subscribers and Cox's 570,000 subscribers, while the \$160 million per company would be paid to Excite@Home in lieu of subscriber fees.

"Comcast's first priority is to provide reliable and high quality service to our customers. To that end, we have been working around the clock to make sure our customers receive uninterrupted high-speed Internet service," said Steve Burke, president of Comcast Cable.

Toronto-based Rogers Communications and Insight Communications also arrived at agreements with Excite@Home Tuesday designed to ensure uninterrupted service to their 425,000 subscribers and 75,000 subscribers, respectively.

The move by the cable companies follows last week's bankruptcy court decision that allowed Excite@Home to break contracts with cable partners as early as December 1st. The split was intended to place the company in a better position to negotiate its way through Chapter 11 bankruptcy proceedings.

Excite@Home filed for bankruptcy protection in September.

By this weekend, Excite@Home had pulled the plug on hundreds of thousands of AT&T subscribers after the two companies were unable to reach an agreement.

News sources reported Tuesday that AT&T withdrew its \$307 million offer to purchase the cable assets of Excite@Home, which represented the only deal pending to buy the broadband company.

After customers were without broadband service for several days, AT&T announced Tuesday that it had connected 500,000 subscribers to the company's own networks and would complete the transition by week's end.

Joe Laszlo, senior analyst for Jupiter Media Metrix, told NewsFactor Network that the Excite@Home shutdown is part of an overall broadband market shift from startup providers to major cable and telephone operators.

"Broadband is becoming more and more a service that is provided by the big guys. Startups that grew up proving broadband only, like Excite@Home, NorthPoint, Covad and Rhythms, are leaving the market, and you're left with broadband providers being major cable operators or major telcos," said Laszlo.

Laszlo noted, however, that the same was not true of the dialup ISP market, and pointed out that the different economics of broadband may have sent Excite@Home scrambling for cash.

"In the broadband market, the economics are different enough. When the market went sour, it was hard to get capital financing to keep building out these networks," explained Laszlo. "Suddenly companies that were pure players found it really hard to shift to sustainable business models around the customers they'd gotten."

Companies like Excite@Home, said Laszlo, that had diversified into the content business and that were still pouring capital into expanding their networks, were stuck.

"As the market for online advertising went bad, suddenly no one wanted to do streaming advanced advertising. They were stuck with this very expensive property they couldn't generate much revenue from," said Laszlo.

AT&T Terminates Pact to Buy ExciteAtHome Assets

AT&T Corp. on Tuesday backed out of an agreement to buy ExciteAtHome Corp.'s high-speed Internet business, leaving the bankrupt company, once a major dot-com force, with little choice but to wind down its operations and close up shop.

ExciteAtHome had no immediate comment, but a lawyer representing the company in its bankruptcy proceedings said it was not likely to find another buyer.

"I think there probably will be no sale of the company's network," said Robert White of O'Melveny & Myers. "We'll end up after 90 days liquidating the company."

This latest development is troubling for ExciteAtHome, whose value has dropped from a high of several billion dollars to almost nothing.

Although the company filed for bankruptcy protection in September and agreed to shut down many of its Internet content assets, it reached a deal to sell its Internet access business to AT&T for \$307 million in cash plus the assumption of some debt, leaving hope that its creditors could recover some of the money they were owed and some of its employees might keep their jobs.

An AT&T spokesman said Tuesday the company had been prepared to hire about 300 ExciteAtHome employees as part of its purchase agreement.

A heavy debt load and a soft online advertising market have hurt ExciteAtHome in recent years, but its high-speed Internet access business, serving more than 3.6 million customers worldwide, had been considered a valuable property.

That value diminished in recent weeks as a committee representing ExciteAtHome's creditors resorted to hardball tactics to force long-distance telephone and cable-television giant AT&T to pay a higher price.

The creditor group maintained that the only way to get a fair price for the business was to shut down the service and force its partners to pay to get it reconnected.

But things did not go as planned when a bankruptcy judge last week approved the shutdown of the ExciteAtHome Internet business. Hundreds of thousands of AT&T customers had their online connections severed, leaving bad blood between the two companies.

On Tuesday, AT&T said it was terminating its agreement to buy ExciteAtHome's assets because of "a number of significant breaches and other violations of the agreement."

AT&T said it was rapidly transferring the affected customers onto its own broadband network and expected 80 percent of them to have Internet access by the end of the day on Tuesday.

An AT&T spokesman said the company could not elaborate on its decision to back out of the deal, since it was focused on restoring service to all the customers that had been cut off.

But his remarks suggested the animosity that had developed between the two companies, which were once partners in building one of the United States' largest high-speed Internet networks.

"Our primary goal had been to purchase AtHome's assets and we put a good faith offer forward, in order to keep our customers from exactly the situation they found themselves in over the weekend," said spokesman Andrew Johnson.

He said it was too early to tell what the financial impact of the service disruption would be, but said AT&T had clearly suffered.

"We certainly have to assume that we will lose some existing customers, and we have no way of knowing the impact (of this disruption) on future customers signing up," he said.

Other cable companies that partner with ExciteAtHome to deliver high-speed Internet access are also rapidly severing relations and transferring

customers onto their own networks.

On Monday, Comcast Corp. and Cox Communications Inc. said they had reached short-term agreements to continue their partnership with Excite to keep up service to their subscribers until they have their own networks up and running sometime in the next few months.

Robert White, the lawyer representing ExciteAtHome in bankruptcy, said those two short-term deals will provide the company with lump-sum payments totaling \$355 million.

But he said they were inferior to the original deal to sell the business to AT&T, which would have assumed some \$84.5 million of liabilities. Now ExciteAtHome must keep its business operating for three months and will use up much of its cash doing so.

'I would guess that maybe it means that (AT&T's) bid was not too low," White said. 'It is very unusual to chase away a buyer when you don't have any other buyers."

In a separate development, the Internet content business InfoSpace Inc. last week agreed to buy certain Excite.com content assets for \$10 million. That represents a tiny fraction of what the Excite Internet portal was valued at in 1999, when AtHome Corp. acquired it for \$6.7 billion.

ExciteAtHome to Fold on February 28

In one of the high-tech world's most prominent flameouts, high-speed Internet service provider ExciteAtHome will go out of business Feb. 28.

The bankrupt company secured \$355 million from many of its remaining cable customers in exchange for keeping its Internet access service running for three more months. After that, ExciteAtHome and its 1,300 employees will cease operations.

The announcement came late Tuesday, after AT&T Corp. withdrew a \$307 million offer for ExciteAtHome's broadband business, saying ExciteAtHome violated agreements by cutting off service to 850,000 AT&T customers. A federal judge had authorized ExciteAtHome to cancel unprofitable deals with its cable partners.

The cable companies paying Excite to stay around - Cox Communications Inc., Comcast Corp., Rogers Cable Inc., Insight Communications, MediaCom Broadband and Mid Continent Communications - have said they need time to develop their own cable Internet networks. The deals require ExciteAtHome to forward e-mails sent to the expiring 'AtHome" addresses to corresponding accounts on the new networks.

The agreements exclude Charter Communications Inc., Adelphia Communications Corp. and several smaller cable companies collectively known as the At Home Solutions Group. Internet service to those companies is being terminated, ExciteAtHome spokeswoman Londonne Corder said.

The plans are scheduled to be reviewed Friday by U.S. Bankruptcy Judge Thomas Carlson in San Francisco.

AT&T withdrew its bid after its new cable Internet access network - built

this fall as protection against ExciteAtHome's woes - eliminated the need for ExciteAtHome's system, said June Rochford, a spokeswoman for AT&T Broadband. In turn, the other cable companies' ability to develop their own networks sealed ExciteAtHome's fate.

ExciteAtHome was formed in 1999 with At Home Corp.'s \$6.7 billion acquisition of the Excite Web portal. Some analysts expected the company to become a powerful Internet player that could challenge America Online.

But the company was beset by questionable management decisions, high expenses and the drastic downturn in the online advertising market, even as its cable access business grew well, from 331,000 subscribers in 1999 to 4.1 million before ExciteAtHome began canceling service last weekend.

Many assets associated with the Excite.com portal were bought for \$10 million by InfoSpace Inc., which issued a statement Tuesday reminding users that the popular Web site is not affected by the meltdown of the cable access business.

AT&T owns 23 percent of ExciteAtHome, which uses a fiber-optic network backbone leased from AT&T. AT&T surrendered its majority representation on the company's board in October, hoping to avoid criticism it had engineered the company's bankruptcy so it could buy the cable access network at a steep discount.

Now ExciteAtHome bondholders, who are owed at least \$1 billion, are considering whether to seek damages from AT&T for allegedly engaging in collusion in its bid for ExciteAtHome and then withdrawing the offer.

'There may be a lot of damages, frankly," bondholders' attorney Joseph Allerhand told Judge Carlson on Tuesday.

AT&T's Rochford called the allegation 'ludicrous."

About 500,000 of the 850,000 AT&T Broadband customers who lost service had been moved to AT&T's new network as of Tuesday, mainly people in Oregon, Washington, Texas and San Francisco. Next in line were customers in Illinois, Denver and Salt Lake City.

Customers in Pittsburgh, Sacramento, Michigan and the Rocky Mountains were due to be plugged in on Wednesday and Thursday; people in Hartford, Conn., on Friday.

'Goner' Worm Hitting Corporate, Individual PCs

A new computer worm named "Goner" was spreading quickly through corporate and personal e-mail inboxes on Tuesday, deleting system files and clogging networks in what could be the biggest outbreak since last year's 'Love Letter" virus, security software vendors said.

'Goner is one of the most incredibly fast moving and potentially dangerous e-mail viruses we've seen," said Mark Sunner, chief technology officer of MessageLabs Inc.

The worm, a virus that propagates itself to other computers through the Internet or other networks, is affecting users of Microsoft Corp.'s Outlook and Outlook Express, said Ian Hameroff, business manager of security

solutions at Computer Associates International Inc.

People using ICQ instant messenger and Internet Relay Chat also are susceptible to the worm because files can be transferred across those networks, Hameroff said.

The Goner worm arrives in an attachment masquerading as a screensaver, with an e-mail subject line of ``Hi" and text that says: ``How are you? When I saw this screen saver, I immediately thought about you I am in a hurry (sic), I promise you will love it!"

Once the attachment is clicked, the worm sends itself to everyone in the user's e-mail address book, tries to close programs that are running and deletes certain system files, including security software, said Hameroff.

Goner also tries to install a denial of service script on machines of IRC users, said Symantec Corp.. That could turn PCs into launch pads for denial of service attacks, which malicious hackers use to flood Web servers with traffic from multiple PCs, effectively shutting down Internet sites to legitimate traffic.

``This is at outbreak status, which is very rare," said April Goostree, virus research manager at McAfee.com. ``The last outbreak we had was 'Love Letter' in May 2000."

A virus is given outbreak status by McAfee.com if it is determined to be spreading quickly and affecting large corporate networks as well as individual computer users, Goostree said.

One of the nastier aspects of the virus is its attempt to disable antivirus and firewall software, so that victims have to reinstall the software in order to prevent future infections, said Sunner of MessageLabs.

UK-based e-mail security outsourcer MessageLabs Inc. said it was receiving more than 100 copies of the worm a minute, totaling about 23,000 worldwide since early Tuesday morning, with users in 17 countries hit.

Anti-virus software firm Trend Micro Inc. said it had recorded infections in 17,000 work stations and 30,000 corporate e-mail accounts across Europe, primarily in France, Germany and the United Kingdom.

The first report came from a French company on Tuesday afternoon, said Raimund Genes, Trend Micro's European vice president of sales. The firm has issued a ``high risk" warning on Goner, the same rating it assigned this summer's virulent Code Red worm

``I expect by tomorrow morning we will see something in Asia, and then from Asia, we'll see re-infections in Europe," Genes said.

The origin of the worm remained unclear. Trend Micro and McAfee.com said they suspect it originated in France. But Mikko Hypponen, manager of anti-virus research for Finland-based F-Secure, said he had his doubts, as the first recorded infections came from the United States and South Africa.

Hypponen also said he thought it suspicious that some of the victims were ICQ instant messenger and Internet Relay Chat users. ``It's most likely written by a teenager targeting other teenagers," he said.

West Virginia Files Suit Against Microsoft

West Virginia's attorney general filed suit against Microsoft Corp. in state court on Monday, alleging the company's business tactics violated state antitrust and consumer protection laws.

State Attorney General Darrell McGraw filed the suit on behalf of West Virginia consumers and state agencies, asking the court to impose unspecified damages and sanctions against the company, an attorney representing the state said.

West Virginia is one of nine states who have refused to join the Justice Department in settling a federal case against Microsoft. The state lawsuit filed on Monday would position the state to opt its 1.8 million residents out of a separate but related class action settlement with the company, according to one source familiar with the case.

The West Virginia lawsuit is based largely on the findings of U.S. District Court Judge Thomas Penfield Jackson, who ruled last year that Microsoft had abused its monopoly in the market for personal computer operating systems.

It also cites two violations of West Virginia consumer protection law, one that prohibits "unfair and deceptive practices" and another that bars companies from selling products below cost "with the intent to destroy competition," according to one source who has seen a copy of the lawsuit.

A spokesman for the company had no immediate comment on the lawsuit.

But the impact of the state lawsuit could fall mainly on a related proposal to settle more than 100 class action antitrust suits that have been filed against Microsoft in the wake of Jackson's rulings.

Those cases are being reviewed by a federal judge in Baltimore. Under the proposal, Microsoft would make amends for its antitrust violations by spending more than \$1 billion to put software and computers into some of the poorest U.S. schools.

Microsoft, along with many of the class action attorneys in the suit, contend the settlement is a creative solution that will put computers in the hands of poor school children.

But class action attorneys from California have complained that the proposal is a legal ruse that will further the company's dominant position in the computer business. They argue the money should be returned directly to consumers who purchased Microsoft software.

The dissenting attorneys, who have filed a case on behalf of California consumers, will ask U.S. District Judge Frederick Motz to strike down the settlement or allow their lawsuits to proceed separately in California.

"There's a pretty high level of dissatisfaction about (the settlement) among the (state attorneys general)," said one source familiar with the case.

By filing suit on behalf of West Virginia consumers on Monday, McGraw could provide the basis to opt West Virginia consumers out of the class action settlement.

Meanwhile, McGraw and eight other state attorneys general are still

pursuing the original, government case against Microsoft in U.S. District Court in Washington.

On Nov. 2 the company reached a settlement with the U.S. Justice Department designed to restore competition in the personal computer software market.

Nine of the 18 states involved in the case joined that pact within days. But the remaining nine states are pressing ahead, insisting the sanctions on Microsoft are not tough enough.

The remaining states are scheduled to file new documents with the district court on Friday outlining their proposal for stricter remedies against the company.

States To Sharpen Claws in Microsoft Case

A group of nine states plans to propose stiff sanctions against Microsoft that could include further opening the Windows source code and could extend to technologies not directly covered by the landmark antitrust case, sources say.

The states are preparing to deliver a remedy proposal to U.S. District Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly on Friday to meet a court-imposed deadline. Microsoft has until Dec. 12 to respond to the legal filing.

The remedy, if accepted, could go well beyond last month's settlement between the company and the government, which includes the Justice Department and half the states that were co-plaintiffs with the federal agency.

The nine states and the District of Columbia--groups that didn't sign onto the settlement deal--are taking aim at what they consider to be glaring weaknesses in the agreement, which was widely considered to be a victory for Microsoft.

One of their areas of focus, sources said, is middleware, which is software such as Web browsers that runs atop an operating system to perform specific tasks.

Microsoft's bundling of its Internet Explorer browser with its Windows 95 and 98 operating systems was one of the cornerstones of the Justice Department case. Some of the state attorneys general believe that the settlement almost completely ignored that issue, said sources familiar with the matter.

The dissenting states also are looking at the possibility of extending their remedy proposal to include Windows XP, streaming media and Microsoft's .Net software-as-a-services strategy.

However, it remains to be seen just how strong the coalition of the dissenting states will be. Some, including Iowa, which has been a leader among the states in pursuing Microsoft on antitrust grounds, gave signs last month that it would still be willing to settle with the software maker under the right circumstances.

On Tuesday a spokesman for Iowa Attorney General Tom Miller would only say that the proposal would be filed Friday.

Microsoft recently has made a number of gains in the antitrust cases against it. Less than three weeks after reaching its settlement with the Justice Department, it cut a deal that would dismiss more than 100 private class-action antitrust cases with donations to public schools valued as high as \$1 billion. In both the federal and private cases, the proposed settlements still have to be approved by a judge.

Also pending are hearings set for this month before the Senate's Judiciary Committee and before a federal judge overseeing the private class-action suits.

Even as the dissenting states finalize their remedy proposal, some members of the group aren't waiting until Friday to take action against Microsoft. On Monday, West Virginia sued the software giant, contending that the company's business practices violate state consumer-protection laws.

The West Virginia lawsuit is largely an attempt to collect damages from Microsoft, legal experts said, and other states may follow suit. The Justice Department case did not include a monetary provision.

"With the settlement of the class-action lawsuits with what many people regard as a pittance, more states will be encouraged to look at monetary remedies. At the very least, there is the possibility of substantial damages similar to the tobacco issue," said Glenn Manishin, an antitrust attorney with Vienna, Va.-based Kelley Drye & Warren.

Microsoft spokesman Jim Desler declined to comment about what the remaining states might or might not do.

"We believe we've reached a fair and reasonable compromise with the Department of Justice and nine of the states," he said. "We feel that any proceedings moving forward should use the narrowed liability of the Court of Appeals decision as a road map."

The remedy proposal seems set to open another chapter in the long-running antitrust saga, in which Microsoft has increasingly had the upper hand. In June, a federal appeals court delivered the software giant an unexpected defeat when it unanimously upheld eight separate antitrust violations against the company. When Kollar-Kotelly joined the fray in late summer, she indicated a desire to see the matter settled swiftly.

"Microsoft is very fortunate with what it has gotten in the government case," said Jonathan Jacobson, an antitrust attorney with Akin, Gump, Strauss, Hauer & Feld in New York. "Microsoft has gotten what has to be viewed as a victory and is trying to lock it in."

California, Connecticut, Florida, Kansas, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Iowa, Utah and West Virginia, along with the District of Columbia, are the states that decided to continue with the litigation, which would lead to a remedy hearing in March.

Brendan Sullivan, who is with the law firm of Williams & Connolly in Washington, represents the states in the proceeding.

Academics, competitors and other parties consulting on the proposal are expected to see parts of the rough document Tuesday. If the states stick to their timetable, a near-final draft will be prepared Wednesday.

The states hope that their remedy proposal will close what they consider

to be loopholes in the settlement negotiated by other the other states and the Justice Department, said sources familiar with the strategy. Signing on to the settlement with the Justice Department were Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, New York, North Carolina, Ohio and Wisconsin.

A main concern of the dissenting states appears to be application programming interfaces, or APIs, which are essential to making sure third-party software works well with an operating system. Although Microsoft agreed in the settlement to open some software code, including server operating system APIs as well as those for the desktop, some states want to lock down what they consider to be loopholes in the agreement.

In an interview with CNET News.com late last month, Brad Smith, Microsoft's incoming general counsel, made it clear that abiding by the terms of the settlement will be a top priority for the company. Microsoft wants to establish a "strong track record complying to this consent decree," he said. "It's obviously of enormous importance to the company to make this work well."

The Justice Department last week published the proposed settlement and Competitive Impact Statement in the Federal Register, as part of a 60-day period of public comment. This process, mandated by the Tunney Act, is part of a stringent review process that must occur before a federal judge can approve this kind of settlement.

The dissenting states could oppose the proposed settlement during the Tunney Act process. But they have all but decided not to divide their energies by opposing the larger settlement through the process defined by that act and by simultaneously continuing with the litigation. Still, sources familiar with the matter warned that the state attorneys general are not in total agreement on this strategy.

The Senate's powerful Judiciary Committee, meanwhile, has scheduled a hearing for Dec. 12 that could compel Assistant Attorney General Charles James to justify the settlement, which many legal experts characterize as favorable to Microsoft. Senators Patrick Leahy (D.-Vt.) and Orrin Hatch (R.-Ut.) are expected to take center stage during the proceeding. Microsoft competitors have operations in both senators' states--IBM in Vermont and Novell in Utah--among other locations.

But the hearing ultimately could have very little impact on the Tunney Act process, as the legislative branch of federal government would have no jurisdiction over the judicial matter without passing a new law.

Microsoft competitors and trade groups representing them have worked feverishly to influence the states' remedy proposal. The Software & Information Industry Association (SIIA) is among the groups offering the states guidance on their remedy proposal. Microsoft quit the trade group last year.

Although former federal antitrust head Joel Klein frequently conferred with Microsoft competitors, his successor, James, met directly with only AOL Time Warner, said sources familiar with the matter. James' former firm, Jones Day, represented the media giant.

"It's not surprising Microsoft competitors regard this settlement as bolstering Microsoft's market power and dominance," said Hillard Sterling, an antitrust attorney with Gordon & Glickson in Chicago. "It's not surprising they would not stand still for this agreement."

Competitors also are ramping up their campaign overseas, where the EU continues its investigation of Microsoft. The company had been scheduled later this month to defend allegations it had used dominance in desktop operating systems to unfairly gain ground in server software. But in a push for settlement, Microsoft pulled out of the Dec. 21-22 hearing.

The political and regulatory climate overseas is potentially more favorable for Microsoft competitors hoping to influence the process, said legal experts. Unlike the United States, where antitrust laws are designed more to protect consumers, the EU rules take into account the competitive impact of a monopolist's business practices.

Amelia Torres, a spokeswoman for the European Commission, the EU's executive arm, said that a decision is expected "sometime next year." She would not discuss Microsoft's settlement overture, but emphasized that the "investigation would continue normally" regardless of the company's decision to forgo the hearing.

"It is much too early at this stage to speculate on what the commission's final decision would be," she added.

If the European Commission rules against Microsoft, the regulatory body could slap the company with a fine of up to 10 percent of its annual revenue, or about \$2.5 billion.

One Brussels-based lawyer, who asked not to be identified, said that the EU is not likely to settle simply because U.S. trustbusters did.

"The commission does not regard this investigation to be the same as the other one in the States," he said. "Your case addressed browsers and the desktop; the commission is looking at servers."

Apple Tells Judge to Take Microsoft Cash for Schools

Apple Computer Inc. said on Thursday it would urge a federal judge to take cash -- not software -- from Microsoft Corp., which aims to settle a suit by giving heavily to schools, one of Apple's top markets.

Apple will file a supplemental brief with a Maryland court, which must approve a proposal that Microsoft settle suits alleging it overcharged for software by giving more than \$1 billion to schools.

Software could represent more than \$500 million of that total, Microsoft said, although Apple Chief Executive Steve Jobs said in a statement that the software donation was valued by Microsoft at \$830 million.

"We think people should know that the actual costs to Microsoft for this donated software will likely be under \$1 million," said Jobs, whose biggest shareholder at Apple is Microsoft.

Apple has already filed a list of objections to the terms of the settlement.

"We think a far better settlement is for Microsoft to give their proposed \$1 billion -- in cash -- to an independent foundation, which will provide our most needy schools with the computer technology of their choice," Jobs

said.

Microsoft will make its pitch on Monday in a U.S. District court in Baltimore. Apple said it would file its supplemental brief with the court on Friday.

States Offer Alternative to Microsoft Settlement

States opposed to last month's settlement proposal in the Microsoft Corp. antitrust case asked a judge on Friday to require a cheaper, stripped-down version of the company's Windows operating system.

The nine state attorneys general also asked U.S. District Court Judge Colleen Kollar-Kotelly to close loopholes in the current settlement deal and to do more to ensure Microsoft discloses key Windows code to other software makers.

"This remedy request offers a powerful and compelling blueprint for restoring competition and stopping Microsoft from abusing its monopoly power," Connecticut Attorney General Richard Blumenthal told a conference call with reporters.

The nine states are promoting their remedy over a settlement Microsoft reached last month with the Justice Department and nine of the other states who were party to the case.

Microsoft immediately criticized the new proposal as "extreme" and said it was "not commensurate with what is left of the case."

The Justice Department declined comment on the remedy proposal.

Under the proposal offered on Friday, Microsoft would be subject to even more sanctions if it violated the terms of the remedy, including further forced disclosure of its software code.

But the hold-out states made no demand to break up Microsoft, a remedy ordered by the original trial judge in the case but struck down by an appeals court.

The stripped-down version of Windows would come without Microsoft's Internet Explorer browser, as well as its e-mail and media player software.

The provision is designed to allow computer makers to customize personal computers to meet consumers' preferences. In addition to the bare-bones version of Windows, the hold-out states want to ensure that Microsoft Office, the popular business software, will be compatible with other software platforms.

They also want to give competitors access to the inner workings of Internet Explorer and allow them to sell their own customized version of the Web browser.

The proposal requires Microsoft to include Sun Microsystems Inc.'s Java programming language in its new Windows XP operating system.

Microsoft had included Java in its operating system for years but dropped it from Windows XP because of legal problems with Sun Microsystems.

Kollar-Kotelly has scheduled a hearing for March to determine what, if any, further sanctions should be imposed against the company.

Hearings will also have to be held on the proposed settlement with the Justice Department.

Microsoft said it remained committed to the settlement reached with the Department of Justice and nine other states, calling that pact a "fair and reasonable compromise that is good for consumers and will be good for the economy."

In the settlement reached last month, Microsoft agreed to take steps to give computer makers more freedom to feature rival software on their machines. The deal also requires the company to share parts of the inner workings of its Windows operating system with other software makers.

Under the settlement, the provisions would be enforced by a three-person technical committee and would stay in effect for at least five years.

The department said the existing settlement terms are strong enough to stop the company's monopolistic practices and would provide the most effective and certain relief in the most timely manner.

Continuing to litigate could drag the case out for another two years, the department has said.

But in their filing today, the hold-out states said the Justice Department settlement does not go far enough.

"Unlike the previously announced settlement between the Department of Justice and Microsoft, these remedies create a real prospect of achieving what the DOJ said it intended to accomplish," the states said in their filing with the court.

Proxy War Looms Over HP-Compaq Deal

Walter Hewlett has fired off another round in his budding proxy war with Hewlett-Packard, this time highlighting the poor performance of HP and Compaq Computer since the companies announced plans to merge.

Hewlett, the son of HP co-founder William Hewlett, said in an amendment filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission on Wednesday that HP's stock dropped 5.3 percent and Compaq's stock dropped 17.8 percent between Aug. 31 and Nov. 30.

For that same time period, the Nasdaq gained 6.93 percent and the Dow Jones industrial average fell 1 percent.

Hewlett recently said he plans to solicit proxy votes on behalf of shareholders opposed to HP's planned acquisition of Compaq and has also hired a proxy solicitation firm.

The Hewlett family, along with David Packard, has come out against the deal. The family has been regularly filing amendments to its Nov. 16 proxy statement.

HP announced plans to purchase Compaq for \$25 billion in September.

Hewlett also draws attention to the decline in expectations for the companies' future performance. The consensus estimates for Compaq's 2002 and 2003 earnings per share have fallen 77.3 percent and 60.2 percent, respectively. Consensus estimates for HP have dropped as well.

As a result, Hewlett maintains, the price-to-earnings ratio that HP is paying for Compaq has increased to 92.7 from 22.2 for fiscal 2002 and to 39.7 from 16.7 for fiscal 2003. The rising P/E ratio--a measure of how expensive a stock is--means HP is getting less earnings bang for its buck.

Packard Foundation to Oppose HP-Compaq Merger

The Packard family foundation, holders of a 10 percent stake in Hewlett-Packard Co., said on Friday it had made a preliminary decision to vote against HP's acquisition of Compaq Computer Corp.

Analysts have said that support of the David and Lucile Packard Foundation was crucial for the deal, which has been opposed by other Packard and Hewlett family members with some 7 percent of HP stock, and criticized by many investors.

The merger has also been seen as a referendum on the leadership of Hewlett-Packard Chief Executive Carly Fiorina, who has spearheaded the plan.

The foundation characterized the decision as preliminary.

"The Board of Trustees understands the strategic considerations being addressed by management, but after thorough study and analysis the Board has preliminarily decided, on balance, that the best interests of the Foundation would be better served by Hewlett-Packard not proceeding with the proposed transaction," board chairman Susan Packard Orr, daughter of founder Dave Packard, said in a short statement.

The decision puts the founding Hewlett and Packard families solidly against the merger, creating a block of shares representing around 17 percent of HP stock opposing the deal.

EU Ministers Back Ban on Unsolicited E-Mail

European Union ministers stuck to a plan on Thursday for a pan-European ban on unsolicited e-mail, fax and text messages, but introduced provisions to ease the restriction in certain circumstances.

The proposal is part of broader legislation on protection of communications and personal data in the digital era, an issue which has become more sensitive in the wake of the September 11 attacks on the United States.

The planned law, which still needs the approval of the European Parliament, will forbid direct marketers from sending unsolicited mail without the customer's prior consent throughout the EU.

It will allow business to send e-mails to individuals following a purchase provided that the customer is allowed to opt out of the mailing list at any time, free of charge.

''EU member states favor a harmonized approach toward opt-in, (except) in cases where there is an existing relationship with a client," European Commission spokesman Per Haugaard told reporters.

Internet users often see their system clogged by unsolicited e-mail -- known as spam -- sometimes carrying computer viruses or offensive messages.

The agreed text risks being rejected by the European Parliament, which wants EU states to be free to decide whether they want an opt-in or opt-out approach. Direct marketing associations are also in favor of an opt-out approach.

Ministers also agreed to back away from an outright prohibition of so-called ''cookies" as long as Internet users were made aware of their presence in electronic systems.

Cookies are electronic tracking devices which can store data from the Internet, sometimes without the user's knowledge.

''Cookies could be coming from anywhere," Joe McNamee, representing Internet services provider group EuroISPA, told Reuters. ''Banning cookies from EU sources is not in practice going to help privacy as much as you would like."

This amendment is also at odds with the European Parliament, which wants to eradicate cookies.

Separately, ministers amended the text to reinforce the right of law-enforcement authorities to retain traffic data beyond the time needed for billing purposes if there was a threat to national security.

This is a victory for Britain, which had been campaigning for more room to maneuver on data retention.

Police authorities believe that access to electronic data would help them track down terrorist activities.

The amended text does not specify how long data should be retained and risks upsetting privacy advocates.

Web Users Pay Price to Send E-greetings

Procrastination on holiday cards could cost you this year: Some e-greeting services that were once quick, free alternatives to envelopes and stamps are starting to charge fees.

AmericanGreetings.com sent notices to members this week saying it will charge \$11.95 annually for access to its e-mail greeting card service. The company is also charging the membership fee at its other sites, including Egreetings Network and Blue Mountain Arts, which AmericanGreetings acquired from Excite@Home in September for \$35 million.

"To make sure that we can continue to bring you the best greetings and all

of the convenient features of AmericanGreetings.com for years to come, we must now charge a very small membership fee," AmericanGreetings' notice read. The company added that it would still offer a "special selection" of everyday cards for free.

AmericanGreetings could not be immediately reached for comment.

Betty Yeh, an Internet analyst for Web site measurement firm Nielsen/NetRatings, said sending online greetings is a "very significant activity on the Web." In October, Flowgo.com received 12.96 million unique visitors, followed by Blue Mountain with 12.95 million, AmericanGreetings.com with 9.6 million, Hallmark.com with 3.3 million and Egreetings with 2.3 million.

AmericanGreetings follows in the footsteps of other online sites, such as Yahoo, Salon.com and Britannica.com, that have slowly evolved from purely free services to ones that are paid. Yeh said that although AmericanGreetings has brand-name connections with the paper-card business as well as a loyal following with consumers, it remains to be seen whether its paid service will be a success.

To entice paying customers, AmericanGreetings is letting members design greetings, add photos, create an address book, and set e-mail reminders for important events. As an added incentive, the company said it will offer three accounts for the price of one so members can share their membership with two other people.

"AmericanGreetings.com is sitting on a goldmine," said Yeh. "But whether they can tap into that...may be tricky."

Web Copyright Treaty Set for March

A treaty that brings world copyright law into the digital age by protecting authors on the Internet will take effect March 6, the United Nations said Thursday.

"This is an important day in the history of copyright, making it better equipped to meet the technological challenges of cyberspace," said Kamal Idris, director-general of the U.N.'s World Intellectual Property Organization.

The treaty, one of two accords negotiated by 160 nations five years ago to protect against piracy on the Internet, received the necessary ratifications from 30 countries.

The second treaty, which mirrors the other, is the first global accord to protect the rights of recording artists and producers. With 28 ratifications it is close to crossing the 30-country threshold, said Idris.

The pair of treaties will let "composers, artists, writers and others to use the Internet with confidence to create, distribute and control the use of their works within the digital environment," he said.

Negotiators said the treaties were essential in an age where digital copies of music can be made almost instantaneously anywhere by computer.

IFPI, an organization representing the global recording industry, welcomed

the announcement as "an important milestone," and said it hoped ratification of the second treaty would follow shortly.

"By ratifying the WIPO Copyright Treaty, governments in 30 countries have shown their commitment to ensuring the future success of the music industry and many other creative sectors in the digital environment," said Jay Berman, chairman of IPFI.

Among the countries that have ratified the copyright treaty are Japan and the United States, but the 15 European Union members are still on the outside because they have a provision that all must ratify together, officials said. The 30th country ratifying the copyright treaty was Gabon.

Idris said that the treaties must become widely incorporated into national law by countries in all regions of the world if they are to be effective.

"This will create the conditions necessary for the broad-based and legitimate distribution of creative works and recordings on the Internet," he said.

Copyright gives authors the ability to control the exploitation of their literary works. The so-called law of "related rights" provides similar protection for performers, producers and broadcasters.

The treaties forge links among different national laws, ensuring that creators are also protected in countries other than their own, WIPO officials said.

The treaties require ratifying countries to grant minimum rights to authors from other countries as well as their own.

The first treaty protects "literary and artistic works," which includes books, computer programs, music, art and movies. It updates the Bern Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works, the major international copyright treaty in the world today which was originally adopted in 1886, and most recently revised in 1971.

The second treaty on sound recordings supplements the major "related rights" treaty, the Rome Convention for the Protection of Performers, Producers of Phonograms and Broadcasting Organizations, which was adopted in 1961.

House Panel Boosts Funds for Cybersecurity Research

A House of Representatives panel voted to dramatically boost federal spending on cybersecurity on Thursday, earmarking \$880 million over five years for research, scholarships and other incentives.

The House Science Committee also voted to increase spending on high-tech research as a whole by 10 percent per year over the next five years, and require government agencies to coordinate their research efforts.

In a brief session that featured no debate, the Science Committee unanimously agreed to devote \$105.7 million to new cybersecurity programs in fiscal year 2003, increasing each year to \$229 million in fiscal 2007.

The new funds would come on top of the roughly \$60 million the federal

government currently devotes to network security.

The National Science Foundation and the National Institute for Standards and Technology would hand out the money in the form of research grants, fellowships and internships for students, and funds to improve undergraduate and master's degree programs in network security.

The hijacking attacks of September 11 heightened concerns about the vulnerability of the nation's telecommunications, Internet and other vital networks to computer-based attack.

In several hearings this fall, experts told Congress that the nation needed to spend more money to encourage long-term academic research in cybersecurity to supplement efforts by commercial software companies.

'The cybersecurity threat is real and potentially devastating," said Rep. Sherwood Boehlert, the New York Republican who chairs the committee.

Boehlert said he hoped the bill would come to a vote in the full House next year. An aide said the bill has the backing of President Bush, but that Boehlert had received no specific commitments from House leadership.

The committee also voted to beef up an existing program that provides funding for broader high-tech research through several government agencies. The bill, which also passed by a voice vote, would increase funding for research into subjects like high-end computing and software design by 10 percent to \$1.15 billion in fiscal 2003, up to \$1.68 billion in fiscal 2007.

Apple Identifies and Corrects iPod Issue

Apple has identified an issue with some iPods that may not wake from sleep when the battery reaches a low charge level.

The company has released an iPod firmware update (version 1.0.2) that fixes this bug. Apple strongly recommends that all iPod customers download and install the update.

In addition to fixing this issue, the firmware update also provides additional quality enhancements and support for additional languages, including Italian, Dutch and Spanish, according to Apple.

If you have already experienced this issue, Apple offers the following steps:

Step One: Check that your hold switch is off by sliding the switch away from the headphone jack.

Step Two: With the iPod connected to power using the iPod Adapter or a CPU with an Apple Firewire port, perform a hard reset by doing the following: Hold down the 'Menu' and 'Play/Pause' buttons simultaneously for approximately 10 Seconds.

If the iPod turns on after performing Steps One or Two, please download the most recent version of the iPod software using the link above.

If the iPod does not turn on, disconnect it from power and let it sit

unconnected for approximately 24 hours. After this time, repeat Step Two above. If the unit turns on, download the latest version of the iPod Software using the link above.

If your iPod is still unresponsive, go to the AppleCare iPod Support Page to arrange for service.

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